

Representations of women who buy sex: A call for scholarly research

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Background:

Opponents of the sex industry generally argue that commercial sex is founded on the idea that men buy sex from mainly female providers which perpetuates a power imbalance rooted in patriarchy, subordinating female agency. The concept of gendered power in commercial sex is disrupted when women buy sex. Newspapers and other media typically represent females consuming sexual services and commodities as evidence of women's growing sexual confidence and of a new and progressive view of sexuality. This paper examines the available scholarly literature about women buying sex.

Methods:

A literature search using electronic data bases; Psyc INFO, PubMed, Sociological Abstracts and ProQuest Sciences, found 28 papers regarding women buying sex, of which three were discussion papers. Of the 25 empirical research papers, 15 were concerned with female sex tourism, six examined female consumption of erotic dance and four examined the marketing of sex and sex toys to women. The papers were thematically analysed to identify key concepts and knowledge gaps.

Results:

The literature regarding sex tourism focused on similarities and differences in gendered behavior, skewing definitions of male or female sex tourism. Sex tourism behavior was generally found to be gender non-specific. Key concepts examined were methods and modes of transactions, and motivations of sex workers and tourists. Females consuming erotic dance also examined gender differences with females having higher levels of aggression, regularly violating rules. The literature suggests a new sexuality, framed as healthy, stylish and pleasurable is being marketed to women.

Conclusion

While media portrays women as increasingly buying sex, there is a general lack of research into the prevalence, motivations and settings in which women buy sex. When women who buy sex are considered constructions of commercial sex based on gendered power lack supporting evidence. Further research is required.

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